

1999 Annual Report Executive Summary

Oglala Sioux Empowerment Zone

To date, following thirteen months of dedicated organizational work, critical activities for the EZ have been completed. They include pre-drawdown grant requirements such as working to establish the twelve member EZ Board, the District Task Forces (8), budget revisions to reflect the final Congressional appropriation, complete revision of benchmarks to reflect the new budget and updated needs as determined by community members, establishment of Articles and By-Laws, and clarification with the Office of General Counsel regarding appropriate language for the By-Laws and Articles so as to qualify the EZ for use of USDA programs. The Board has also advertised for an executive director and four support staff. Several one time documents and the MOA with USDA were signed on March 15, 2000.

Benchmarks have been updated and are basically ready for input to the electronic tracking system. The three-day planning session in Rapid City, last November, greatly helped the focus and update work on the strategic plan and it involved 70 plus community members from several communities in the EZ.

As the organizational work was developed and advanced, an increased off-reservation awareness of the EZ became apparent, as well as the need for ongoing communication. EZ Board members, USDA staff and others have received several public and private inquiries, which indicate a serious interest in supporting the goals held within the strategic plan of the EZ. Examples include a business in Rapid City who is considering investment or expansion opportunities in the EZ, calls from individuals who have expressed interest in moving their business to the reservation, (one which wants to generate family-based natural products for re-sale globally), and a large corporation who was hosted by the EZ Board in cooperation with USDA and HUD staff, to review their willingness to create a \$40 to \$100 million dollar investment which would collaborate nicely with existing EZ plans to build homes on the reservation....while using alternative building products. We are encouraged by the initial interest of the private sector.

Additionally, District Task Forces, which need more nurturing from USDA and EZ Board Members, are working on proposals that will be brought forward for funding/partnership consideration. The lists of potential District Projects are long; in some cases critical. The EZ Board has designed an initial process to handle requests, which are sensitive to accomplishing the goals defined in the Strategic Plan. The process will specifically ask which of the five basic needs and related goals identified in the plan are to be addressed by the requests being brought to the board.

President Clinton's visit in July, 1999, brought promise of access to new markets as well as a higher profile for the EZ. His visit, coupled with staff presentations and statewide speaking opportunities, plus alignment with the national Community Empowerment Board's intent on supporting this EZ, have raised both the profile of this EZ and expectations by partners and the public. Increasing pressure is being felt by those involved to move quickly on project delivery and funding. Community members are also anxious to see results of the EZ as promised.